1:Murphy and Quain E-4,5 (1938) 1955
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CHAPTER TWO

TRUMAÍ SUBSISTENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Vital Statistics

The population of the Trumaí village in 1938 was 43. This figure includes the 3 foreign women in residence and excludes those few Trumaí who were living with other groups. There were 17 men, 16 women, and 10 pre-pubescent children, of whom 8 were male and only 2 were female. Due to the previously mentioned capture and forced marriage of Trumaí women, the average age of females seems to have been considerably greater than that of males. Two men were considered by the Trumaí as old, while four women were placed in that category. This disparity of age undoubtedly had an influence on the Trumaí birth rate.

Infant mortality seems to have been high, and Quain was of the opinion that it was further aggravated by abortion and infanticide. The fact that there were eight male children and but two girls suggests that infanticide must have been practiced only upon females. Quain's notes, however, give no indication that this was the fact. Pulmonary diseases have devastated all the groups of the upper Xingú, but the drop in the Trumaí population from 43 in 1938 to 25 in 1948 is probably not paralleled in the other villages during that time.

Village and Gardens

The Trumaí settlement was located a scant half-mile from a lagoon that opened directly upon the east shore of the Kuluene just a few miles away. The mouth of the lagoon was narrow, but it broadened out into a lake of moderate size with many small bays and was ringed with swamps. Proximity to the river made insects a continual nuisance during the rainy season. The Kamayurá village, located near the sandy beaches of a lagoon lined with *buriti* palms, was relatively free of insects.

The village consisted of four houses and another under construction. Between the houses and the surrounding forest lay an area of weeds and low underbrush into which refuse was thrown. The ground within the ring of houses was kept comparatively free of weeds and litter. The village "plaza" was about 200 feet wide. In the center were the log bench and fireplace of the men's gathering place. Nearby was a conical wicker cage in which the village harpy eagle was kept for its feathers, which were used in ceremonies.

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105 182 648 in the Trumaí community, for, as Oberg notes, no adult male would choose to live with a people of such low status.[1]

105 162 It might be expected that the Trumaí could have compensated for this drain by raising their birth rate. However, in this population of 43 persons, there were only ten children, an extremely small number when the low average life span is considered. Furthermore, only two of the children were females. Of the approximately twelve women who 105 were capable of bearing children, only one was pregnant, and the others 163 were urging her to abort her child. Thus, infanticide and abortion were 161 taking a heavy toll in the Trumaí village.

847 845 The custom of killing twins and of spacing births three or four years apart are reported by Oberg for the Kamayurá,[2] and these factors may well have been present in the Trumaí situation. The long post-natal [171] taboo on sexual intercourse had the same effect. Wagley, who studied the dying but equally unacculturated Tapirapé, found that traditional practices were contributing to the complete depopulation of that group also.[3]

105 161 178 154 But among the Trumaí there is still another and less tangible dimension. Abortion may have been urged on a pregnant woman because she had no husband, but how is one to explain the killing of two of Aloari's children without his consent, or the fact that there were eight male and only two female children in the community? The limited information available suggests that the Trumaí were purposely restricting their number and committing suicide, perhaps unintentionally, in the process. Two reasons for this extreme behavior may be hypothesized: first, the impasse in which the Trumaí found themselves because of the steady depopulation made them so personally insecure and apathetic regarding both the present and the future that they were no longer willing to rear sizable families, despite their evident devotion to children; and second, they may not have thought it possible to produce the surplus necessary to support such families. Actually, however, even with their diminished numbers the Trumaí could have increased their food supply.

105 511 433 226 Their lowered standard of living was due to more than attitudes. Loss of population no doubt also decreased the yield of Trumaí fishing and therefore limited their chief source of protein. To be sure, bow and arrow fishing was little affected, but fish poisoning, the only communal subsistence technique practiced by them, was much less effective when employed by a small group, for a few people can adequately poison only smaller watercourses and branches of lagoons, while a greater number can cover larger streams and whole lagoons. In the latter circumstance, both the take would be larger and larger species would be available. Moreover, when the waters are heavily poisoned and enough people are present to reap the "harvest," there is less chance of fish escaping. Thus, up to

[1] Oberg 1953, p. 15. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 62. [3] Wagley 1940.